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92nd plenary meeting
Tuesday, 26 April 2016, 10 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Lykketoft (Denmark)

The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Agenda item 7 (*continued*)

Organization of work, adoption of the agenda and allocation of items

Third report of the General Committee (A/70/250/Add.2)

The President: I invite the General Assembly to direct its attention to the third report of the General Committee. In paragraph 1 (a) of the report, the General Committee recommends to the General Assembly that an additional item entitled "Cooperation between the United Nations and the International Organization for Migration" be included in the agenda of the current session under heading I, "Organizational, administrative and other matters".

May I take it that the General Assembly decides to include an additional item entitled "Cooperation between the United Nations and the International Organization for Migration" in the agenda of the current session under heading I?

It was so decided.

The President: In paragraph 1 (b), the General Committee further recommends that the item be considered directly in plenary meeting. May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to consider the item directly in plenary meeting?

It was so decided.

The President: I should like to inform members that the item entitled "Cooperation between the United Nations and the International Organization for Migration" becomes agenda item 175 in the agenda of the current session.

Agenda item 73 (*continued*)

Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance

(d) Strengthening of international cooperation and coordination of efforts to study, mitigate and minimize the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster

Special commemorative meeting of the Assembly in observance of the thirtieth anniversary of the Chernobyl catastrophe

The President: Many of us remember the horror and fear that we all felt 30 years ago when the nuclear accident happened in Chernobyl, in what is now Ukraine — the most severe accident in the history of the nuclear-power industry. The accident caused a huge release of radionuclides over large areas of Ukraine, Belarus and the Russian Federation; devastated the region's mostly rural economy and uprooted more than 300,000 people. Livelihoods lost almost 30 years ago have yet to recover fully and many affected are still struggling to overcome poverty, exclusion and the stigma of contaminated regions.

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Today, we remember the human cost of the disaster. We remember those who sacrificed their own lives to prevent this disaster from becoming even worse. We take stock of the many problems that still linger and we look ahead towards solutions that hold promise for the affected communities. And we renew our commitment to a safer future. Let us acknowledge the Governments of the three countries most affected by the Chernobyl catastrophe — Ukraine, Belarus and the Russian Federation — for working to protect the affected populations from the effects of radiation, to mitigate the consequences of the Chernobyl accident and to build a better future for the communities.

The General Assembly and the United Nations Development Programme — as coordinator of all United Nations activities related to the Chernobyl accident these past years — have also played an important role. This year, alongside this thirtieth anniversary, we also mark the end of the decade of recovery and sustainable development for Chernobyl-affected regions.

A series of activities are taking place in the affected countries, including a high-level conference in Minsk, which began yesterday and a photo exhibition, entitled "Chernobyl, tragedy, lessons, hope", is on display in the Secretariat building now. These activities will be followed by a report of the Secretary-General and action during the seventy-first session of the General Assembly. Moving forward, we continue to demonstrate international solidarity, so that those most affected by this accident will be able to recover to the fullest.

Before proceeding further, I should like to consult members with a view to inviting Mr. Edmond Mulet, Under-Secretary-General and Chef de Cabinet of the Executive Office of the Secretary-General, to make a statement on behalf of the Secretary-General on this occasion.

If there is no objection, may I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly, without setting a precedent, to invite Mr. Edmond Mulet to make a statement at this commemorative meeting?

It was so decided.

The President: I now give the floor to Mr. Edmond Mulet, Under-Secretary-General and Chef de Cabinet of the Executive Office of the Secretary-General, to make a statement on behalf of the Secretary-General.

Mr. Mulet: We are here to mark the thirtieth anniversary of the Chernobyl disaster, the most serious nuclear accident in history. I am pleased to address the Assembly on behalf of the Secretary-General. The disaster led to grave humanitarian, environmental, social and economic consequences. It cast a radioactive plume across a wide area of northeastern Europe and its effects are still being felt in the region and around the world.

This anniversary offers an opportunity to take stock of lessons learned, reflect on the recovery process and to appreciate, once again, the heroic efforts of the first responders who rushed to the damaged reactor on 26 April 1986 and sacrificed their health, and in many cases their lives, to save others. The tragedy of Chernobyl will always be linked with nuclear safety. The accident led to a new awareness of safety issues and to major improvements in the regulation of nuclear plants around the world.

The Chernobyl disaster also brought the international community together to support the enormous efforts of local, regional and national authorities. I particularly commend the Governments of Belarus, the Russian Federation and Ukraine for their joint work. The most visible sign of current international cooperation efforts may be the New Safe Confinement structure, which is now nearing completion and should make the reactor complex stable and environmentally safe for the next 100 years. We all owe gratitude to the Governments and international institutions that contributed to the costs of this record-breaking structure.

Since 1986, the United Nations has helped to address the needs of people in the areas surrounding Chernobyl, first through emergency and humanitarian aid, and then by supporting recovery and social and economic development, which still continue. The United Nations has also helped to provide essential information on the continuing impact of radiation on local communities.

I commend the success of the development approach adopted 10 years ago and led by the United Nations Development Programme. Communities that were affected by the accident are now more self-reliant and self-sufficient and lessons have been learned for the future. Knowledge gained from the tragedy at Chernobyl is helping other people and communities around the world to protect themselves and to recover from trauma, including during the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear emergency of 2011.

There is a growing risk of disasters in which natural events combine with chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear crises. At the World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul on 23 and 24 May, the Secretary-General will ask leaders to consider multidisciplinary strategies that include prevention, preparedness and response.

Looking ahead, long-term recovery efforts around Chernobyl must be linked to the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. The promise of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (resolution70/1) to leave no one behind applies above all to those caught up in crises around the world; those who have struggled for years to overcome fears about their health and livelihoods; and those who continue to demonstrate their resilience as they walk the road to recovery and development. Their loss and pain will never be forgotten.

The President: I thank the Under-Secretary-General and Chef de Cabinet of the Executive Office of the Secretary-General for his statement on behalf of the Secretary-General.

I now give the floor to the representative of Belarus.

Ms. Roche (Belarus): Thirty years ago today, at exactly 1.23 a.m. on 26 April 1986, a chain of events in reactor number 4 at the Chernobyl nuclear-power station led to a massive explosion spewing deadly radioactive contamination into the beautiful night sky, where the blowing winds scattered it far and wide, unfolding at terrifying speed and thereby triggering what has become the world's worst nuclear disaster. A new word, "Chernobyl", entered into the history of language, the history of world disasters and the history of the world with deadly and frightful force. The sun shone, the wind blew, rain fell down and so did the radioactive poison.

My name is Aċi Roche and I am from the Republic of Ireland. Today, on this day of worldwide remembrance and reflection on the tragedy that is Chernobyl, I am given the opportunity of addressing the General Assembly thanks to the generosity of the Belarusian Government and Mission.

I cannot speak to the Assembly with the authority of a scientist or doctor; I cannot prove my statements with laboratory or field test experiments, for I have no medical or scientific academic qualifications to endorse my remarks. But, in humility, I can offer the Assembly my truth, my witness and my evidence of the heart. I have visited and worked in the Chernobyl area for 30 long years and I am still haunted by the stories of the people I have met during that time — women like Tanya from a demolished village in southern Belarus called Lipa. I remember that she talked about how she was forever rooted like a tree to the earth of her ancestors, but now she was withering away and dying. Shaking her head in disbelief, she said:

> "We did not just lose our village, we lost life. Chernobyl is like a big stone in my heart, always heavy, always present, and now the song of this village has come to an end."

And there was Pavel, head of his family, who remained in that village. When I asked him why he remained in that contaminated place, he knelt on the ground and picked up two fist fulls of earth, and with tears running down his face, he kissed that earth and he said,

> "This earth is sacred. It is the earth of my ancestors. This earth is my soul. If you take me from the earth and you take my soul."

Pavel, and thousands like him, have suffered the great loss of place, community and history forever.

Chernobyl, and now sadly Fukushima, is very bleak and dark forever — a sin against the beauty and wonder of our beautiful planet Earth, a sin against ordinary decent people. There may be an impression that 30 years on Chernobyl is something from the past, that it no longer poses a threat to the world, but the reality is very different. Chernobyl is not from the past; Chernobyl is, sadly, forever. The impact of that single shocking nuclear accident cannot be undone. Its radioactive footprint is embedded in our world forever and countless millions of people are still being affected by its deadly legacy. We may never know the full extent of the contamination, we may never be able to prove it as if it were a simple geometry proposition, but the tragedy that is Chernobyl is very real.

Three weeks ago, I returned to the highly contaminated "zones of alienation", "zones of exclusion", as they are called, that surround the Chernobyl plant and beyond. I was there on a fact-finding mission, and while there, I was asked by some of the men who heroically fought for days and months to contain the spreading of that radioactive fire, the men who carried out the evacuations of towns and villages, the men who had to demolish and bury and burn 2,000 towns and

villages, to bring their stories and their voices to this gathering today.

Today, I wear this Chernobyl service medal with great pride, deep respect and a deep sense of responsibility. This photograph was given to me by a liquidator military officer called Valerii Zaitsev. I hold the photograph in this Hall in acknowledgement of the work that men like Valerii and others did in order to protect our planet. There were 700,000 of these men — the liquidators — and they were ordinary people. They were soldiers; they were civilians; they were helicopter pilots, firemen, miners and engineers. They were sent into the Chernobyl nuclear conflagration. Valerii and his gallant comrades fought the highly radioactive fire at Chernobyl. It was their Ground Zero. Like the brave rescue services, the heroes of 9-11 in New York's terrible catastrophe, they, the Chernobyl liquidators, these noble and self-sacrificing men, ought to be rightly honoured and recognized as the heroes, who not just saved Europe, but really saved the world from greater catastrophe. Many of the Chernobyl liquidators feel that they have not been so honoured; in fact, they feel that they have been dishonoured, neglected, abandoned and forgotten by the world.

So, my first appeal to the Assembly is that these heroic men, these first responders of the nuclear accident age — the liquidators — be recognized and that the world set up a global fund to ensure their medical and social needs are taken care of. In honouring my pledge to Valerii and the thousands of other brave fighters, I respectfully place this request before the floor of this House.

Secondly, I also respectfully propose that this day, 26 April, be pledged and designated as an official United Nations Chernobyl day — a day that would always be honoured and commemorated and be a day for renewal and recommitment to discover new initiatives to alleviate further the suffering of the people in the affected stricken lands.

Thirdly, I would like to say that to prevent the next Chernobyl from becoming Chernobyl itself, I ask that the United Nations urgently use its power and influence to propel forward the completion of the new sarcophagus, the vital safety shield over the exploded reactor, which is critical to ensuring that we can contain the highly radioactive materials, which are rumbling and lurking still in reactor 4, and that we move swiftly to the next phase — phase two of dismantling the reactor and safely finding a way to remove and store what will be hundreds of tons of highly radioactive material. This project is a challenge because it has never been done before and will require new technology, new thinking and new expertise.

Fourthly, I also humbly ask for the provision to be made to fund access to clean food and adequate food monitoring, in order to protect the citizens still living in the stricken regions.

Fifthly, I ask that monitoring and radiation check-ups of people be reinstated throughout the stricken regions, along with the provision of the most up-to-date medical and scanning equipment, ensuring extensive ongoing monitoring, particularly for children and pregnant mothers living in the contaminated zones.

Finally, I ask that the contaminated zones of highly radioactive land be kept free of cultivation and repopulation.

All representatives in this Hall are moms or dads or grandparents maybe, and some members are aunts and uncles. Today, I ask representatives to remember and honour the children, the innocent children of Chernobyl. So much has been lost and so much has been compromised. Surely, we owe it to them to do all we can to safeguard their health, their happiness and their right to a safe and secure future, because children are every nation's greatest treasure. They are our greatest asset. They are our bequest to future generations, and yet, they are usually voiceless and anonymous.

I represent them also here today. I am a voice among other voices, other voices who speak up and out for the protection and value of all children. Let those voices be heard today rising from this great Assembly. For while other disasters are vying for the entire Assembly's attention, unfortunately Chernobyl is often relegated to the realms of history and the past, probably because the images from the tragedy are so different from the deeply disturbing images of war, famine and other disasters in which we can see the immediacy of a bomb, a bullet or starvation.

However, the war that has been waged since 1986 by Chernobyl is a silent, invisible but nonetheless deadly one. It has no smell, no taste and nothing to forewarn of danger. There was no safe haven, escape or emergency exit. Yet it beats in the hearts of every innocent man, woman and child still living. It beats in their rivers, towns, streams and forests — the deadly

radiation, clicking endlessly and ferociously in Geiger counters, into the silent numbness that is and always will be Chernobyl.

Former General-Secretary Kofi Annan really encapsulated his understanding of the tragedy when he said,

> "Chernobyl is a word we would all much prefer to wipe out from our memories, as it recalls an event which opened a Pandora's box of invisible enemies".

Those enemies will stalk the land for the rest of time. Those sobering words act as a stark reminder of our need to be vigilant in the protection of our planet and environment. The great Welsh poet Dylan Thomas urged us, "Do not go gentle into that good night [but] rage, rage against the dying of the light".

Today, on the thirtieth anniversary of one of the blackest and darkest moments of human history, let us rage against the dying light — that dimming light of not doing enough, neglect, forgetfulness, abandonment or even indifference. Let us rage against that dimming light today on this thirtieth anniversary. Let us rage, renew and rekindle our commitment to the innocent victims of Chernobyl. Let us restore their lives and their hopes, and let us from this hallowed Hall say to them, once more:

> "You are not forgotten, you are not irrelevant and you are not peripheral. We will do together our utmost to care for and protect you. We are brothers and your sisters, and your pain and suffering are also ours".

Those here today represent not just their Presidents, their Prime Ministers and their Governments; they also represent the common men, women and children of their countries and of the planet. I ask them to please listen and act, and let us together rededicate our efforts today to further alleviate the plight of the innocent victims and survivors of Chernobyl, offering them that most precious and enabling gift of all — the gift of hope.

As we are here at the United Nations, let us relight that beacon of hope in the heart of hope of the General Assembly. Let that beacon-light flash throughout our planet. But especially, let that light of hope fly to the dear people and lands of Belarus, Ukraine and Russia, to say to them,

> "Look! look! The flame is not quenched and the beacon is still alight. Gather near and gather strength from its light and warmth, because you are not forgotten and not alone. You are among friends and neighbours who care and who want to share in your plight — not just with fine words, but with positive and life-changing initiatives of action. For there is always hope."

There must be hope, and that hope lies with all Member States.

The President: I now call on the representative of Ukraine.

Mr. Yelchenko (Ukraine): I would like to warmly thank everyone in attendance at this solemn occasion. At the outset, I would like to sincerely thank you, Sir, for convening this meeting, and the delegation of Belarus for such an emotional introduction to our debate.

The catastrophic nuclear accident that we recall today occurred on 26 April 1986 at the Chernobyl nuclear-power plant in the Ukrainian town of Prypyat, which at the time was under the direct jurisdiction of the central authorities of the former Soviet Union. As has been proved, the Chernobyl disaster was the worst nuclear-power-plant accident in history in terms of cost and casualties. For Ukraine in its modern history, the scale of the catastrophe can be compared only to the famine of 1933, the Second World War and the Russian aggression and occupation from 2014 to the present.

Prior to Chernobyl, humankind had not known such a technological catastrophe in terms of its scope and the complexity of the long-term humanitarian, environmental, health, social and economic consequences. Addressing the impact of the Chernobyl disaster is a matter of national significance for Ukraine. For 30 years, my country has made every effort to improve the well-being of affected communities and revive the afflicted districts' economic potential. The catastrophe disrupted the livelihoods of over 1,960,000 people in more than 2,200 affected locations. Strengthening the resilience of affected communities and restoring their self-reliance is the foundation for their sustainable development and our utmost priority.

In that regard, the shift from the restoration of the area to its sustainable socioeconomic development can take place only if radiation safety requirements are fully met. Therefore, Ukraine places emphasis on converting the shelter facility into an environmentally safe system and completing the construction of the New Safe Confinement. At the same time, significant

progress has been made with regard to the development of infrastructure for the safe long-term management of radioactive waste and the handling of depleted nuclear fuel. We are moving ahead to the final stage of mitigating the consequences of the disaster, namely, the dismantling of unstable structures, extracting the fuel-containing materials and converting them to make them safe.

The Chernobyl disaster has had a serious political and security impact, and it changed attitudes towards many aspects of everyday life, in particular to the nuclear-energy industry and its safeguards. International regulations and standards for radioactive protection have been substantially revised, as have national strategies for nuclear energy development, nuclear safety and radioactive waste management.

Effectively overcoming the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster, especially transforming the confinement into an ecologically safe system, is very much affected by the need to withstand Russian aggression. In those challenging circumstances, international cooperation is essential. Throughout the years, the United Nations system, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and the European Union have demonstrated their unwavering commitment to helping Ukraine with the restoration of the affected areas. We express our sincere gratitude for their support in implementing international projects aimed at the sustained recovery and development of afflicted districts.

Today the global terrorist threat in the context of peaceful nuclear development is an emerging international issue.Therefore, Ukraine welcomes the focus of the international community on the physical protection of nuclear material, as well as the coming into effect of the nuclear security agreement on 8 May, reducing the risk of a terrorist attack on nuclear-power plants.

We remain committed to the rehabilitation of the affected areas, enhancing the radiation monitoring system, and addressing issues related to the construction of an industrial facility for deactivating, transporting, processing and disposing of radioactive waste. Our plan also includes the creation of a research and environmental protection centre that will collect and synthesize existing research and a training system for nuclear and radiation security specialists.

This year we have reached an important benchmark, namely, the completion of the United Nations Action Plan on Chernobyl and the 2006-2016 Decade of Recovery and Sustainable Development of the Affected Regions. However, there is a clear need for a continuous effort to keep the issue of post-Chernobyl recovery high on the inter-agency and international agendas. It is important to give a stronger voice to the human dimension of preparedness for and recovery from nuclear emergencies at the United Nations level and to incorporate that knowledge and experience into development programming worldwide.

The approach to studying. mitigating and minimizing the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster may serve as a guide for dealing with similar emergencies in the future. The solutions can be applied to and replicated in other nuclear-disaster situations worldwide. Therefore, the post-2016 international Chernobyl cooperation, in particular any new General Assembly resolution, should include the goal of broader dissemination of knowledge and expertise for the sake of sustainable technological risk management, disaster prevention, response and recovery.

Ukraine declared 2016 as a year of remembrance of the liquidators and victims of the Chernobyl disaster. We believe that goal-oriented cooperation among all Government agencies, non-governmental and international organizations will not only result in long-term solutions to the complex problems triggered by the Chernobyl accident, but will also optimize the knowledge gained for the common good in order to prevent any future nuclear disasters. I take this opportunity to invite all participants in this meeting to the official opening of the thirtieth anniversary of the Chernobyl disaster exhibition, which will take place today at 1 p.m. in front of Conference Room 1.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Russian Federation.

Mr. Kononuchenko (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank you, Sir, for convening this meeting. Today marks the thirtieth anniversary of the accident at the Chernobyl nuclear-power plant — one of the largest man-made disasters of the twentieth century — which affected the territories of Belarus, Ukraine and Russia. At that time, no similar incident anywhere in the world had ever been endowed with the same gravity, the same scale of radioactive contamination or the same number of people who were affected, and this required a huge

investment in intellectual and material resources to overcome the catastrophe.

In the most difficult initial period following the accident, hundreds of thousands of Soviet citizens, including more than 200,000 Russian liquidators, were involved in the cleanup. Today we bow before their bravery. They risked their lives and in so doing fulfilled their duty and prevented the further contamination of very damaging radioactive emissions. Despite the selfless work of the liquidators and the nation-wide emergency measures to minimize the consequences of the accident, radioactive contamination affected an enormous area, including more than 59,000 square kilometres of Russian territory that were home to more than 3 million people.

Another fact that has not lost its relevance is the long-term objective of overcoming the consequences of the accident. Minimizing these on the basis of new technologies would be in everyone's common interest. That is the direction we need to move towards on the basis both of technology and of the financial potential of the entire international community. The Russian Federation is working to mitigate the effects of the Chernobyl disaster, including by constantly monitoring background radiation levels; improving the medical care and everyday conditions of citizens who live in the affected territories; working with participants and their families in liquidation; and rehabilitating agricultural and forest land. This component is an essential part of several federal programmes that cover more than 1 million Russian citizens.

The consequences of Chernobyl affect more than one State. Russia is working actively with other countries and international organizations on this issue. This year we will see the final assessment of the implementation of the Action Plan for the 2006-2016 Decade of Recovery and Sustainable Development of the Affected Regions. We thank the United Nations Development Programme for coordinating this work and helping to implement joint projects.

The Russian Federation has made a significant contribution to the development of post-Chernobyl cooperation. We consistently advocate continuing to work with all partners, particularly the countries of the Chernobyl troika, under United Nations auspices, with the inclusion of this issue in the global context of sustainable development for the post-2016 period. That format will ensure maximum results, including through the involvement of a broad number of external partners in the efforts that the parties will undertake in the foreseeable future We will continue to build practical cooperation in disaster risk reduction through the United Nations Inter-agency Group. It should maintain its function as the coordinating and executive centre for international Chernobyl cooperation.

I should like to touch on another important aspect — guaranteeing energy security. Humankind has learned lessons from Chernobyl. To a certain extent, the accident at Fukushima led us to also rethink those lessons. We have become more careful and more cautious. That is a fact. But at the same time we also understand that nuclear energy is unique both in its efficiency and in its minimal impact on the environment compared to other sources. That is why we continue to use atomic energy for the benefit of humankind, not forgetting the high degree of responsibility borne by the owners and operators of nuclear-energy infrastructure.

It is regrettable that even today, on this sad ceremonial day honouring the memory of the heroes of Chernobyl and all of those who suffered in the Chernobyl accident, the representative of Ukraine could not refrain from vile insinuations that are in no way relevant to the discussion of this very important subject on our item today.

The President: I now invite representatives to stand and observe one minute of silent prayer or meditation for the victims of the Chernobyl catastrophe.

The members of the General Assembly observed one minute of silent prayer or meditation.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Uganda, who will speak on behalf of the Group of African States.

Mr. Nduhuura (Uganda): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Group of African States in commemoration of the thirtieth anniversary of the Chernobyl catastrophe. Coincidentally, 10 years ago, in commemoration of the twentieth anniversary of the Chernobyl catastrophe, my country, as the then Chair of the African Group, also spoke on behalf of the African Group (see A/60/PV.77). Today, the African Group once again joins the rest of the international community in standing in solemn remembrance of a tragedy that has gone down in history as the worst nuclear accident ever. We stand in solidarity with the affected countries and applaud their efforts to build resilience through

national strategies to mitigate the consequences of the Chernobyl catastrophe.

Ten years on, the African Group also notes progress in the strengthening of international cooperation and United Nations system-wide coordination, and further calls for accelerated progress in the full implementation of the third decade, proclaimed as the Decade of Recovery and Sustainable Development of the Affected Regions. Our collective resolve and commitment in honour of the victims of the Chernobyl can be meaningful only if we strive to achieve the goal of a return to normal life for the affected communities within this third decade. The African Group remains resolutely committed to working towards achieving that goal.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran, who will speak on behalf of the Group of Asia-Pacific States.

Mr. Khoshroo (Islamic Republic of Iran): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Group of Asia-Pacific States. On this thirtieth anniversary of the disastrous nuclear accident at Chernobyl, the Asia-Pacific Group honours the memory of the accident victims who lost their lives or health, remembers those men and women who continue to suffer from the radioactive fallout of the Chernobyl catastrophe, and pays tribute to the heroic actions of those relief workers who risked their lives to protect people from the harmful effects of the accident.

This occasion is also an opportunity to recall the achievements made over the past 30 years in dealing with the harmful and costly legacy of the Chernobyl disaster. However, we recognize that much more remains to be done to promote the recovery of the affected region. We acknowledge the achievements and ongoing efforts of the Governments of Belarus, the Russian Federation and Ukraine, as the three countries most affected by Chernobyl, to protect their populations from the effects of radiation, mitigate the consequences of the accident, rebuild the affected areas and promote socioeconomic development. We stress the importance of continuing international support for such efforts.

We commend the important contributions and assistance provided so far by the United Nations in response to the Chernobyl disaster. We recall that in 2007, the General Assembly adopted resolution 62/9, on Chernobyl, proclaiming the period from 2006 to 2016 as the Decade of Recovery and Sustainable Development of the Affected Regions. In that context, we welcome the progress made in the implementation of the 2008 United Nations Action Plan on Chernobyl. We encourage the international community and United Nations agencies to strengthen cooperation and assistance on Chernobyl with the objective of promoting the recovery of the affected communities and ensuring their sustainable development.

Finally, the events at Chernobyl and later at Fukushima remind us that nuclear accidents know no borders. Those tragic events remind us of the vital importance of nuclear safety and the continuing need to work to ensure and strengthen nuclear safety. We must remain determined to prevent similar nuclear accidents.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Belarus, who will speak on behalf of the Group of Eastern European States.

Mr. Dapkiunas (Belarus): Today, the Group of Eastern European States calls for remembrance of the severe disaster at the Chernobyl nuclear-power plant in Ukraine that led to the loss of human lives and had significant health, environmental and economic consequences in the countries of our region. We pay tribute to those who died at the time of the catastrophe and those who carried out the first response and paid the price with their lives or sacrificed their health and well-being. We stand in solidarity with those who live in the affected areas in our countries.

It was one of the biggest man-made disasters and it affected not only our region. It was a tragedy for the entire international community. Nevertheless, it gave rise to one of the most remarkable examples of comprehensive, global cooperation to overcome the consequences of a major disaster. It changed the way countries dealt with nuclear power by improving safety and security and stimulating a more cautious attitude to technological progress.

In that context, the importance of international standards in nuclear safety and security cannot be underestimated. The Chernobyl disaster encouraged countries using nuclear energy to initiate the Convention on Nuclear Safety and later, following the Fukushima accident, to adopt the Vienna Declaration on Nuclear Safety. The disaster led to the allocation of enormous domestic and international resources to development, health care, environmental protection and agriculture in the affected regions.

For almost 30 years the United Nations has been playing a crucial role by coordinating multilateral assistance to mitigate the long-term consequences at the community, national, regional and global levels. In that respect, we acknowledge with appreciation the role of the entire United Nations family and the United Nations Development Programme and its Administrator as the current United Nations Coordinator of International Cooperation on Chernobyl.

As one of the results of such cooperation, the global community has gained unique knowledge and mastered best practices and experience on how to prevent, address and resolve the long-term consequences of man-made disasters. It highlighted one of the primary lessons of Chernobyl, namely, that the international community should stay vigilant, prepared and united in the face of such disasters, as was witnessed, for instance, in the aftermath of the Fukushima nuclear accident in 2011.

The lessons of Chernobyl and other nuclear accidents oblige us to develop nuclear technologies in conformity with the letter and the spirit of international nuclear safety and security requirements. Countries must assume responsibility for their own peoples and those of the whole world when planning, developing and operating nuclear facilities. That is the most reliable and efficient way to prevent similar disasters from happening, as the cost of mistakes is much too high for our world.

Mr. Tommo Monthe (Cameroon), Vice-President, took the Chair.

But even more than a technological disaster, Chernobyl was and remains an enormous human tragedy that showed us the fragility of our world. It revealed the importance of the simple things that keep humanity alive — caring for loved ones, empathy for the suffering of others and willingness to lend a helping hand to those in need. The lesson of Chernobyl that we all still have to learn by heart is about how easily those plain but vital things can collapse, and how challenging it is to repair them through assistance, dialogue and cooperation.

Preserving a positive, forward-looking Chernobyl agenda is not only the way to keep remembrance. Its meaning is also about investing in our future through enhancing partnership and cooperation, working for greater safety worldwide, reducing the risk of disasters and preserving knowledge and experience. In paying respect to the past, we must look forward. What we wish to highlight today is that Chernobyl should stay as a reminder to us all that we have a shared commitment to a better, safer and more prosperous future that leaves no one behind.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the representative of Argentina, who will speak on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States.

Mr. García Moritán (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): The first tribute we have to pay is to the victims, the public servants who rushed to their aid and the intergovernmental and civil-society humanitarian organizations that demonstrated, in tragic circumstances, that the best response to both the sorrows and hopes of humankind is cooperating, extending a hand in solidarity and assistance and showing a humanitarian conscience above all else. In the end, we humans are tied inexorably together by our shared nature, destiny and defence of human dignity.

The Chernobyl tragedy shook national security and international complacency. It showed that there is no such thing as zero risk for nuclear activity or any other scientific areas, and reminded us once again that mutual trust is the bedrock of international security. It showed that when the security of the whole world is threatened, national interests must be aligned with those of the collective. As a result, under the auspices of the International Atomic Energy Agency it became possible to quickly and willingly negotiate two key agreements on multilateral nuclear security, the Convention on Early Notification of a Nuclear Accident and the Convention on Assistance in the Case of a Nuclear Accident or Radiological Emergency.

That response confirmed the potential of multilateralism. However, one must ask why it took a tragedy of such proportions to develop entirely rational and predictable mechanisms for preventive international cooperation. The lessons of Chernobyl do not apply to nuclear security alone. The most important of all its lessons must be the capacity to anticipate any situation or occurrence, from pandemics to natural disasters, that could result in humanitarian catastrophe.

The main actors in the Chernobyl tragedy and its recovery have always been the people who were affected. They suffered, and they are the protagonists of its reconstruction. A photographic exhibit of their heroism and sacrifice is on display here, and we thank its organizers for that testimony to memory and hope. The international community also played and continues

to play an extremely important role in aiding the victims of Chernobyl in their recovery and in rebuilding their devastated communities. Over and over again, we hear and believe that the best part of the United Nations system is its humanitarian dimension. We owe a great deal to the specialized agencies, programmes, funds and entities of the United Nations. We are also greatly indebted to the dozens of Member States and hundreds of non-governmental organizations and members of civil society that have contributed to this shared task.

What is important, 30 years on, is to have the moral certainty that humankind's progress should not be marked by such tragic circumstances. This disaster requires a multilateral response, and for that it is essential that we reform the United Nations. Much more than speeches, we need the political will to consolidate the effectiveness of our collective response in the face of global threats. The greatest tribute we can pay to the victims of Chernobyl during the Assembly's seventieth session is to adopt a serious, thorough approach, unsullied by mistrust or small-minded calculations, to proposals aimed at strengthening the humanitarian capacity of the United Nations. Our regional group is committed to that goal.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the representative of Malta, who will speak on behalf of the Group of Western European and other States.

Mr. Grima (Malta): I have the pleasure to speak on behalf of the Group of Western European and other States, and I am pleased to join the President, as well as the representatives of Ukraine, Belarus and the Russian Federation, in this Hall today to commemorate the thirtieth anniversary of the Chernobyl disaster.

While many people remember the immediate aftermath of the explosion at the Chernobyl nuclear-power station well, 30 years later most of them are still unaware of the legacy it has left for the people, especially the children, of the affected region and beyond. The global community, led by the United Nations, has been involved in dealing with the Chernobyl disaster over the years. starting with emergency relief and humanitarian assistance and gradually shifting to capacity-building and sustainable development of the affected regions and communities. In that regard, we welcome the implementation by the United Nations of the Chernobyl Decade of Recovery and Sustainable Development of the Affected Regions, which is expected to be completed at the end of this year.

Nevertheless, we cannot ignore the suffering and needs of those affected, and we commend the donors that continue to fund initiatives addressing the long-term consequences of the accident, with a view to achieving sustainable development for the contaminated areas. In that regard, we welcome the work being done by the Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations Coordinator of International Cooperation on Chernobyl to define the vision for post-2016 international cooperation.

Chernobyl has cast a long shadow over the new generations and daily lives of people in the affected area. We should remain committed to continuing to work with all concerned to ensure the success of efforts to restore the site, improve the environmental situation and alleviate the legacy of the social and medical consequences of the Chernobyl accident, as well as to striving to avoid such incidents in the future.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the representative of the host country, the United States of America.

Ms. Mendelson (United States of America): On behalf of President Obama and the people of the United States of America, my delegation wishes to join other members and observers here today to mark the thirtieth anniversary of the Chernobyl accident, the horrific loss of life that resulted, the incredible bravery of the first responders and on-site health professionals, and the efforts of so many in the decades since to mitigate the long-term humanitarian and environmental effects of the disaster.

Who among us who was alive then and is of a certain age today does not recall exactly where they were when they heard about the accident? As a graduate student at Columbia University studying that region, along with my fellow students I was filled with emotion and fear, thinking of what was happening on the ground. I was especially concerned because we learned of the accident only days later. That was just at the beginning of *glasnost*, a few years before Ukraine's independence, and long before the technology that connects and defines us in 2016.

Today, we recall the valour of emergency workers who rushed to the scene, the first to respond to the events at Chernobyl in April 1986. As clouds of radioactive smoke billowed into the air, these men and women struggled valiantly to contain the nuclear fallout and to mitigate the humanitarian catastrophe, likely knowing

that their efforts would result in their own deaths in the coming hours, days and months. Their heroic sacrifice and the continued existence of a 30-kilometre exclusion zone around Chernobyl together serve as a powerful reminder that the events of Chernobyl must never be forgotten.

In remembrance of their sacrifice, we join with others to reiterate our commitment to and strong support for the multinational effort to secure and return the site of the Chernobyl nuclear accident to an environmentally safe and stable condition. In addition to contributions made by individual countries, international organizations have contributed assistance in the form of evaluations, assessments, recommendations and the coordination of humanitarian and research initiatives. International and United Nations organizations and bodies — such as the International Atomic Energy Agency, the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation, the World Health Organization, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, UNESCO, the European Commission, the International Committee of the Red Cross and many others — have also responded.

This thirtieth anniversary is an occasion for us to consider how the international community can further strengthen its coordination, cooperation and communication in responding effectively in the immediate, medium and long terms to complex humanitarian disasters such as that at Chernobyl. The United States remains steadfast in its commitment to overcoming the effects of Chernobyl. Among other measures, we will continue to support critical containment efforts such as the construction of the interim spent-storage facility at the Chernobyl site, consistent with the commitments that have been made by President Obama and other senior United States officials.

Nuclear energy plays a vital role in satisfying and diversifying the world's energy needs. It is also a crucial component of our effort to reduce harmful greenhouse emissions. So as we pause here today to reflect on the events of 26 April 1986 and the commitment of the international community to mitigating the effects of Chernobyl, we should note the renewed commitment of the international community to nuclear safety.

This is an anniversary of solemn remembrance as we recall all the victims of the disaster from Ukraine, Belarus and the Russian Federation — from the emergency workers who gave their lives to those living in the area and affected by the fallout. This is an anniversary of solidarity. The United States is committed to continuing to provide significant contributions in addition to the more than $400 million which the people of the United States have already provided to Ukraine over the years to ensure that the Chernobyl disaster no longer has an impact on future generations.

Finally, this is an anniversary to acknowledge recovery, as the site's 31,000-ton dome is close to completion, will soon be moved into position over the destroyed reactor, and is set to last for the next 100 years. By confining the ageing sarcophagus to protect the surrounding environment and securing the spent fuel, the plant can be decommissioned and the people of Chernobyl can finally begin a new chapter.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the representative of Cuba.

Mrs. Rodríguez Abascal (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): We commemorate today the thirtieth anniversary of the terrible catastrophe of the nuclear-power plant in Chernobyl, which changed the course of thousands of lives, particularly those of children, in the affected areas of Ukraine, Belarus and Russia.

The nuclear accident was discussed for the first time in the United Nations in 1990; since then, the international community has provided humanitarian assistance to the population suffering its consequences. Chernobyl is therefore a name linked not only to the tragedy, but also to the global response and the realization of international cooperation as a purpose of the United Nations, as set out in Article 1.3 of its Charter.

Cuba was one of the first States to respond to the request for international assistance. In early 1990, Cuban specialists visited Ukraine in order to determine the type of assistance that could be provided. On March 29 of that same year, the first 139 affected children arrived in the island for medical treatment. That moment saw the launch of a massive and free comprehensive health-care programme, aimed at providing the children affected by the Chernobyl accident with medical treatment in Cuba.

As part of this humanitarian programme, which is now 26 years old, over 25,395 affected people from various countries, including more than 21,340

children — mostly from Ukraine — have received medical treatment in Cuba. This assistance programme has also had a scientific impact, as important data concerning internal contamination in children of the affected areas have been collected. This information has been shared in the framework of important scientific events and been used by agencies of the United Nations system, including the International Atomic Energy Agency and the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effect of Atomic Radiation.

Cuba does not offer what it has in excess; rather, it shares what it has. The treatment programme for the children affected by the Chernobyl catastrophe is another example of our humanitarian and internationalist policy, demonstrating how international cooperation and solidarity can help us address the challenges facing humankind.

The Acting President: The Assembly has thus concluded its special commemorative meeting in observance of the thirtieth anniversary of the Chernobyl catastrophe.

May I take it that the Assembly decides to conclude its consideration of sub-item (d) of agenda item 73?

It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 11.20 a.m.